UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON
FACULTY OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT
BARTLETT SCHOOL OF PLANNING

Inventing a City Region: From Teesside to Tees Valley to TeesCity

A critical assessment of the Northern Way and the City Region approach to regenerating the Tees Valley

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Being a Report submitted to the Faculty of the Built Environment as part of the requirements for the award of the MSc Urban Regeneration at University College London: I declare that this Report is entirely my own work and that ideas, data and images, as well as direct quotations, drawn from elsewhere are identified and referenced.

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Abbreviations

CABE	Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
CCWG	Core Cities Working Group
CR	City Region
CRDP	City Region Development Programme (Northern Way)
DTI	Department for Trade and Industry
ESDP	European Spatial Development Perspective
ESRC	Economic & Social Research Council
MCR	Mega City Region
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
PUR	Polycentric Urban Region
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SMI	Stockton-Middlesbrough Initiative
TTW	Travel To Work (Areas)
TVCRDP	Tees Valley City Region Development Programme
TVL	Tees Valley Living
TVP	Tees Valley Partnership
TVR	Tees Valley Regeneration
URC	Urban Regeneration Company

Abstract

Recent burgeoning interest in city regions (CRs) among academics and policy-makers has taken a step-change in the UK in the form of The Northern Way, an economic growth strategy explicitly predicated on eight CRs.

This paper looks critically at how the CR approach applies to the Tees Valley, a CR without a dominant core city. What *is* the CR approach as set out in the Northern Way and does the concept make sense in the particular (polycentric) context of the Tees Valley? What is it likely to achieve, what are the pitfalls and what are the practical policies and actions that follow from this?

The paper begins by analyzing the evolution of the CR as a concept in academic and policy discourse, exploring the role of cities in the global economy, regional competitiveness, territorial cohesion and governance issues. Different forms of CR are considered and also the practical usefulness of the concept.

Section 3 examines the Northern Way approach to CRs. Section 4 explores the CR concept in the specific social, cultural, historical, economic, spatial and political context of the Tees Valley.

The concept is shown to be an emerging but still slippery and ill-defined area of research,being shaped as much by politically-motivated initiatives such as the Core Cities Working Group and the Northern Way as by academic debate.

It is tentatively concluded that the Tees Valley does indeed represent a form of polycentric CR and that conceptualising the area as a CR has several potential benefits: generating meaningful economic analyses, workable governance structures, effective strategic plan-making and a clear shared vision of the future. However, significant barriers to success remain: resistance to the Tees Valley 'brand', current negative perceptions of the area and dispute about the desirability or plausibility of creating a 'core city' for the CR.

(298 words)

1. Introduction

The past decade has seen growing interest among academics and policy-makers in the role of cities and city regions (CRs) as engines of economic growth and sources of regional and national competitiveness in the globalising 'new' or 'knowledge' economy, eg Sassen (2000), Scott (2001).

In England, this interest has begun to inform and generate several key policy initiatives. The Core Cities Working Group (CCWG), a coalition of central, regional and city government[1] was formed in 2002 to "make policy recommendations to raise the competitiveness of England's major cities and to enable them to function effectively as drivers of growth for their regions" (CCWG 2004). The ODPM's recent guidance on preparing Regional Spatial Strategies makes explicit reference to CRs and their role in "spreading the benefits of a prosperous city to the wider region" (ODPM 2004b). Most recent and most notable is The Northern Way, an economic growth strategy for the north of England[2] explicitly predicated on eight 'City Regions' (Northern Way 2004a; Northern Way 2005a).

The Northern Way, I suggest, represents a step-change in UK policy discourse around cities and city regions, shifting the debate to a new level of seriousness. Significant political capital and funding have been invested at both national and regional level, not to mention the time and resources contributed by the individual Northern Way City Region partners and research teams. The initiative stands close to the heart of key government agendas, including the £22bn spatio-economic Sustainable Communities plan (ODPM 2003; ODPM 2004a) and the Treasury-DTI-led 'Competitiveness' and 'Productivity' agendas (HM Treasury and DTI 2001).

All the more reason then, given its political and economic significance, that the Northern Way and its CR approach should be founded on a sound theoretical base; if not, we can expect inadequate policy outcomes and poor returns on the political and

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[1] ODPM, HM Treasury, DTI, the Government Offices for the Regions, the RDAs and the eight self-styled Core Cities: Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield.

[2] This essentially comprises the three northern government regions (North West, North East, Yorkshire & Humber) although it is notable that the Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield CRs all claim links to areas beyond these boundaries into North Wales and the East Midlands.

financial investment. The trouble is that, as much of the literature stresses, our understanding of the processes of global economic integration and their impact on urban and regional development patterns is only partial and still evolving. Many of the theories are contested and the models provisional. It is clear that "traditional planning and policy strategies [are]... increasingly inadequate" but, "more effective approaches remain largely in various stages of hypothesis and experimentation" (Scott 2001, book jacket blurb).

The starting point for this paper is a concern about the conceptual underpinning of the Northern Way CR-based approach. The fear is that, as Kitson et al. (2004) observe in a recent survey article on Regional Competitiveness, "policy has raced ahead of conceptual understanding and empirical analysis".

In particular, I am interested in how well the CR approach applies to the Tees Valley, a polycentric urban region (PUR) without a dominant core city and lacking the size and many of the urban assets of most of the other CRs in the Northern Way. Without a city or much in the way of 'cityness', is there a city region at all?

The key research questions this paper addresses are:

1. What is the 'city region approach' as set out in the Northern Way?
2. Does the concept make sense in the particular (polycentric) context of the Tees Valley?
3. What are the likely benefits of a CR approach for Tees Valley?
4. What are the likely pitfalls?
5. What are the recommendations for policy and action?

A Note on Methodology

The paper is a straightforward discourse analysis based on a review of relevant published theory, policy documents and currently available data. This is complemented in Section 4 by anecdotal insights and perspectives derived from private conversations and meetings with regeneration practitioners, politicians and residents in Teesside and the wider North during the course of my professional work there.

No structured attempt has been made to gather original primary data, either quantitative or qualitative, through formal interviews, questionnaires or other means. It is recognised that this would be a useful further step to substantiate the paper's findings.

2. Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Framing all the following discussions is the impact of globalisation and the 'new' or 'knowledge' economy on patterns of urban and economic development. Technological advances in transport, telecommunications and IT have radically reconfigured global economic flows of goods, services, capital and labour, bringing once-separate markets into direct competition with each other.

The consequences are familiar: the migration of many industrial, manufacturing and increasingly service functions to lower-cost regions in the Far East, the growth of trans-national corporations, 'footloose' international finance free to invest wherever it chooses, mobile labour and, for developed nations especially, the growing emphasis on the leveraging of specialised 'knowledge capital', innovation and creativity to achieve productivity gains, new products and services to remain competitive in global markets. In short, the emergence of a 'new economic geography'.

There is much debate and uncertainty among theorists and decision-makers alike about the practical implications of these changes at national, regional and local level in terms of economic development tactics, urban form, transport and land-use planning and appropriate political and administrative structures.

Many of the key concepts germane to this discussion are therefore contested, in flux or partially formed. Academic models and policy prescriptions are often unfolding in parallel, informing and feeding off each other. This is nowhere more true than in the Northern Way, where an essentially political process of vision-making and action-planning has resulted in a contribution to theoretical frameworks through exploratory studies and papers commissioned as part of the process, eg Coombes (2005). The following discussion therefore considers academic and policy contributions to the field simultaneously.

2.1. *Competitive Cities in the Global Economy*

The advent of the globalising knowledge economy has prompted a reappraisal of the value of cities and city regions to national and regional economic growth, debated in an extensive and growing literature. Where post-industrial cities were once perceived as problem areas of economic, social and physical dereliction – employment black holes, haemorrhaging population, crime-ridden, a drain on public resources – they are increasingly now cast as places of opportunity and crucibles of innovation in the new economy.

The key attributes of cities – size, density and socio-economic diversity of people and activity – and their 'historically strong concentrations of information-gathering and informational-exchanging activities' (Hall 1993) such as universities, cultural facilities, media, financial and business services, make them ideally placed to act as attractors, generators and facilitators of innovation and knowledge exchange between firms and individuals. These traditional strengths are further bolstered by the ability of cities to act as gateways to international markets, expertise and suppliers, through airports, sea-ports and advanced telecommunications infrastructure.

To a certain extent, such arguments are extensions or recastings of well-established theories around the benefits of agglomeration and clusters in achieving economies of scale, scope and complexity – 'neo-Marshallian' industrial districts offering the positive externalities of shared specialist labour pools, supply chain linkages, localised business networks, common ways of doing things, knowledge spillovers (Marshall 1919; Amin and Thrift 1992).

However, it is suggested that cities are more than just large concentrations of production and consumption; "they are also important 'learning pools', where the mix of individual and corporate expertise, innovation, creativity, knowledge and skills is at its deepest" (Docherty, Gulliver et al. 2004). While cities have always played a role as hubs of creativity, innovation and exchange throughout history (Hall 1998), it is argued that the informational-exchange and knowledge-nurturing capacity of cities has become particularly important in an era where knowledge capital is the ultimate source of competitive advantage.

Accordingly cities compete with each other as locations for firms, as nodes for exchange and processing of information and as places to live, work and consume. The sectors that matter most are the so-called advanced producer services (APS) such as accountancy, advertising, finance/banking, law, technical and management consultancy, alongside other 'high order' activities such as research and development, information technology development and corporate headquarters. There is also a premium set on the 'creative industries', media, music and so on. All cities jostle for position in national and international league tables to attract a greater share of such industries (Beaverstock, Smith et al. 1999; Begg 2001; Taylor 2004).

In this context, size alone is not sufficient or even a condition; the specific milieu of a given city – the qualities of space, place, image or 'brand', 'vibe' or 'ambiance', the inherited historical and cultural assets, the institutional and social capital – all these become critical success factors and key determinants of a city's ability to attract mobile, high value, knowledge-rich workers, businesses and investors and then to facilitate their productive interaction (Porter 1995; Landry 2000; Florida 2002).

Docherty et al (2004) provides a helpful conceptualisation of these urban assets in a series of 'bundles'. These have increasingly become the focus of attention and policy initiatives for city authorities seeking to boost their ranking in the global or national pecking order.

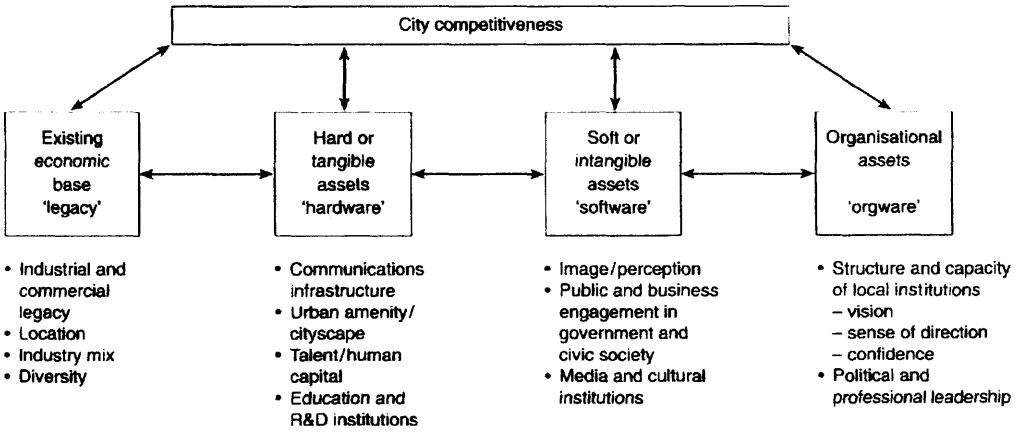

Figure 1: Urban Asset Bundles. ***Source: (Docherty et al, 2004)***

A similar notion of 'Territorial Capital' has been developed for describing potential sources of regional competitiveness (Zonneveld and Waterhout 2005).

It should be noted that recent analysis emerging from the ESRC 'Cities, Competitiveness and Cohesion' project is voicing a more sceptical line about this orthodoxy around cities and competitiveness, challenging what is felt to have become the New Conventional Wisdom or 'NCW' (Buck, Gordon et al. 2005).

This perspective suggests that the case for cities as a panacea for achieving global competitive advantage is overstated and that the evidence in favour of the arguments is still "rather thin at present" (Turok 2004). The NCW, stylised and consensual, masks the "specific and uneven experience" of different cities, population groups and institutions, and risks overlooking a series of other factors including: the contribution of national, supra-national and regional bodies to economic and social development; the potential damage of unproductive competition between cities within regions and nations; and the influence of inherited habits, structures and corporate inertia in dictating location and investment decisions.

And while the traditional agglomeration advantages derived from the size and diversity of concentrated economic activity in cities (i.e. improved access to markets, suppliers, collaborators and labour pools) may still be significant, such benefits are tempered – especially in older cities – by "higher costs, more congestion and inferior access to the motorway network compared with surrounding areas and some smaller towns". In general, we are warned that "urban and regional development need to be understood as historical, path-dependent processes in which new industries are laid down on and shaped by inherited conditions" (Turok 2004), p1080.

2.2. City Regions, Regional Disparity and Territorial Cohesion

In the above discussion we have largely conceptualised cities as if they were isolated entities in space, disembodied points on a global economic circuit board facilitating flows of capital, services and expertise across international networks. In reality of course cities are located firmly in regional and national space, affecting and being affected by their surrounding territories. Cities rely on their regions for basic natural resources (water, food) and other factors of production such as energy, raw materials and increasingly and most importantly labour. In turn they act as processing and

service centres for their regions, providing administrative coordination, business, retail, cultural and other services.

This forms the basis for the growing interest in 'city regions', since the competitiveness of individual cities is partly determined by and partly determines the competitiveness of the surrounding region. In turn, city and regional competitiveness then become key determinants of overall national competitiveness.

In the UK, this has become a political preoccupation as the government grapples with the problem of regional disparities in economic performance across the country. Indeed, the issue has been inscribed into the Government's Public Service Agreement (PSA) Targets, with responsibility shared between HM Treasury, ODPM and DTI:

> "To make sustainable improvements in the economic performance of all English regions and over the long term reduce the persistent gap in growth rates between the regions, defining measures to improve Performance and reporting progress against these measures by 2006."
>
> PSA6, (HM Treasury 2005)

This is not just another attempt to heal the North-South divide and reduce social inequity – it is cast as a critical mission for national prosperity, since it is argued that the lagging regions act as a brake on national economic growth (HM Treasury and DTI 2001).

Concern for regional disparities and their damaging effects on long-term sustainable economic health also lies at the heart of the EU notion of 'Territorial Cohesion' and the so-called Lisbon Agenda, which highlights the need to proactively counterbalance the negative effects of increased inter-European competitiveness brought about by the 'single market' and globalisation. This in turn has become a major guiding principle of the European Spatial Development Perspective (European Commission 1999), which, though not statutory, is shaping strategic spatial plan-making across all member states including ODPM's Sustainable Communities plan.

This then forms the backdrop for the arguments about the vital role of cities and city regions (CRs) promoted by the Core Cities Working Group (CCWG) set out in *Our Cities Are Back* (CCWG 2004) which, as I will argue, forms the precursor to the Northern Way's emphasis on CRs. Building on two earlier studies commissioned by

the CCWG into European experiences and the factors affecting international investor locational choices (McCann 2004; Parkinson, Hutchins et al. 2004), it posits CRs as the 'key economic building blocks' of national and regional economies, with vibrant 'major cities' at their heart containing, it asserts, the principal economic assets and the most productive businesses. It identifies "six generic factors which underpin the most successful cities...economic diversity; a skilled workforce; connectivity – internal and external; strategic decision-taking capacity; innovative firms and organisations; and quality of life." (p4)

The report does acknowledge that "more research is needed into the processes by which competitiveness in cities systematically drives up performance in all parts of the region" but its key message is clear:

> "In our study, there were no successful urban regions which did not have successful cities at their core. The regions which performed well were those where the core city performed well – and vice versa."
> (Parkinson et al 2004, quoted in CCWG 2004, p25)

As the report subtitle spells out:

'Competitive Cities
make
Prosperous Regions
And
Sustainable Communities'

The CCWG assembles a persuasive case for the role of cities and CRs which skilfully pushes many of central government's 'hot buttons'. However, we should recall that the CCWG is a special interest group and that *Our Cities Are Back* is an advocacy document for further government investment in core cities. The Parkinson report which forms the intellectual foundation for the claims risks becoming a self-fulfilling study. The European comparator CRs[3] which it examines are necessarily similar in form – by the nature of being benchmarks – to those of the English Core Cities. In other words it assumes a normative paradigm of the successful CR as a larger core-city and surrounding territory. There are no control cases of more

[3] Helsinki, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Lille, Toulouse, Lyon, Frankfurt, Dortmund, Stuttgart, Munich, Milan, Turin, and Barcelona.

polycentric regions, Emilia Romagna or the Berkshire 'sunrise corridor' for example, nor any consideration of smaller settlements – university towns, county towns, cathedral towns – which by some estimations have been the fastest growing and most successful forms of urban settlement over the past decade in the UK outside of London (Turok and Edge 1999).

This is not to downplay the potential importance of major cities, or the value of the study, but merely to remember that the CCWG has a special case to plead and that the large city model is not the only form of successful CR or successful settlement in the new economy.

2.3. The Form of City Regions and Polycentricity

The notion of the CR is principally derived from economic analysis. Parr (2005) provides a survey of the many guises it has taken in the literature – 'metropolitan community', 'urban field', 'polarized region'– but in essence, the concept is a recognition of the interlinked and interdependent flows of labour, goods and services that exist between urban settlements and their surrounding territories.

Parr suggests three factors driving current interest in the CR concept. First, a sense that the city (not just the legal entity or formal administrative boundaries, but also the built-up area) is an increasingly outmoded entity and inappropriate unit of analysis and government which fails to reflect underlying social and economic structures and patterns of flows, particularly with respect to housing, retail and labour markets. This has increasingly been the case in recent decades as urban areas have spread out due to improved personal mobility (cars), telecommunications links and firm location choices. Second, a feeling that the central state is too distant and unwieldy to respond with sufficient nuance to local conditions, priorities, and difficulties. Third, the emergence of the 'new regionalism' and the "attention on the region as a scale of intervention and regulation" (Deas and Giordano 2003).

While the CR has long been a recognised feature of the space economy of a nation, precise definitions have been lacking, and the concept has been used in a variety of ways at widely differing spatial scales with no upper or lower limit on what counts as a CR. The difficulty lies in the fact that different kinds of flows operate on different

scales and do not map neatly onto each other. For example, travel to work (TTW) areas do not necessarily conform to consumer spending patterns, local business linkages do not match housing markets, different kinds of retail and leisure catchments do not even match each other (grocery shopping versus specialist shopping, cinema versus live theatre). To the man on the street, this is common-sense but to the economist or city authority this causes analytical confusion: where does the influence of one centre finish and another one start? The usual default definition is the outer extent of labour and housing markets. As we shall see, the Northern Way CRs do not approach any common definition.

In terms of forms of CR, there are two basic models: monocentric and polycentric. Parr (2005) develops a two-part structure for the monocentric form, consisting of the 'C Zone' (city) and 'S Zone' (surrounding zone), between which there are different 'zonal interactions' of trade, labour and capital flows. The C zone represents "a centre of service provision, both public and private...a transport and communications node...a focus of ownership, control, business organisation and public administration". The S Zone is "a territory that...is linked more with the C zone in question than with the C zone of some adjacent CR" and will contain both rural and urbanised populations, including towns of significant size. Confusingly, Parr says that the S zone may contain clusters of smaller urban centres that form polycentric urban regions (PURs).

Parr further elaborates his model by suggesting there are cases where a CR may have more than one C-zone (eg Glasgow and Edinburgh for the 'Scotland CR'), with each C zone having a distinctive set of interactions with the entire S zone. He also notes the possibility of the 'auxiliary C zone', mostly in peripheral regions, where distances are so great and population densities so low that interactions that would normally take place with the main C zone actually happen with a lesser settlement that acts as a proxy (eg Plymouth instead of Bristol in the South West). He also allows for the possibility of 'secondary CRs' within 'primary CRs' where a high level of interaction may take place between a secondary C zone and its own (secondary) S zone for many functions, but certain specialised and high value interactions still take place exclusively with the primary C zone (eg Stoke-on-Trent and Birmingham within the West Midlands CR). Furthermore, it is entirely possible for one CR to contain both auxiliary and secondary C zones.

While this model helps clarify the nature of different interactions between C and S zones, it brings us no closer to a stable definition in terms of scale, nor to the challenge of how to form meaningful governance structures and policy interventions to match the real economic flows.

Turning to the polycentric or polynucleated urban region (PUR), we find that it too has a number of conceptual fore-runners – Friedman and Miller's 'urban field', Pred's 'city systems' and the notion of 'urban networks' – surveyed in (Van Houtum and Lagendijk 2001), although the definitions are scarcely more stable.

The basic proposition is that distinct but geographically close settlements are interdependent and tied together in functional regions, again in terms of trade, commuting and other flows. It should be noted that the pattern of these flows is generally more complex than the supposed core-periphery in-out flows of the monocentric CR model: movements cut across each other, labour and housing markets interpenetrate and overlap. No single centre dominates any other within the CR. There is also an implication or assumption that different centres offer functional specialisation and, further, that these specialised functions are somehow interdependent. It should be noted that morphological and functional polycentricity are distinct and one should not mistake mere co-location or proximity for interaction or interdependency: settlements can be spatially close but have no meaningful linkages, as the Tyne & Wear CRDP study suggests is the case for Sunderland, at least in labour market terms (Coombes 2005).

While these preliminary definitions may look cogent, once again the issue of scale is problematic and open to interpretation. Parr (2004) sets out some criteria for qualification as a PUR (pp232-233), but shies away from specifying either an upper or lower limit on the degree of centre separation for example. Moreover, urban networks which may appear polycentric at one scale (say, sub-regional) will appear functionally monocentric at another higher scale (regional) and may themselves form part of even larger scale polycentric systems or Mega City Regions (MCRs) at national or supra-national level.

2.4. *The Utility of City Regions: Visions, Governance, Collaboration*

We come now to the usefulness or otherwise of the concept of CRs. It is salutary to observe first that the notion of the CR as a spatial unit is largely an invention of economists and regional scientists, developed either to describe or to model economic flows, and does not necessarily correspond to the lived daily realities or perceptions of individuals.

This is not to say, however, that it is without practical purpose or remains unrelated to lived daily realities. Van Houtum and Lagendijk (2001) suggest that the principal value of the PUR (and by extension the CR, whatever its morphology) is as a 'geo-strategic' visioning and planning tool, rather than an analytical concept. They develop the notion that regional identity is a product of three interdependent dimensions; cultural, functional and what they call 'geo-strategic' identity:

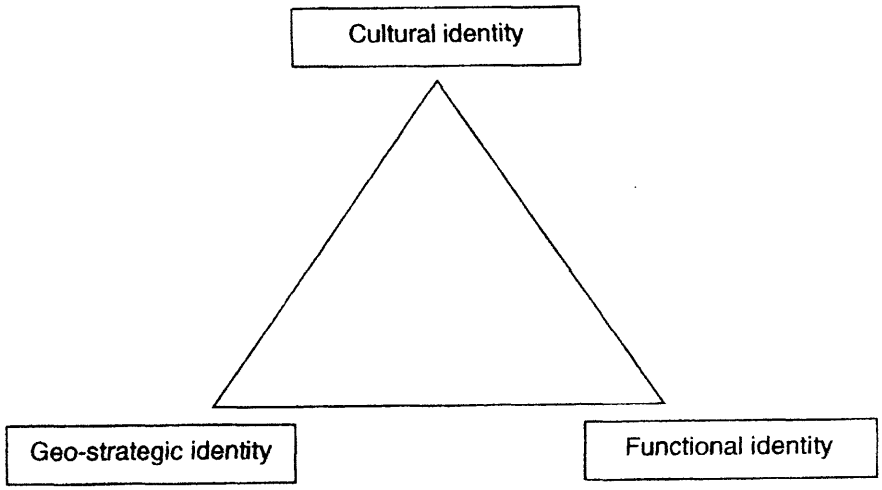

Figure 2: The interpretative dimensions of the identity of PURs. ***Source: (Van Houtum and Lagendijk 2001)***

The 'geo-strategic' dimension – that is to say the artificially imposed spatial image of a particular territory, often expressed as a map or diagram – is potentially very powerful and has the capacity over time to shift perceptions, change behaviours and reconfigure mental maps: in fact to forge new shared identities, goals and perspectives.

The power of the PUR or CR in this analysis is to provide an "image of urban structure, in order to have a conceptual basis for organising ... strategies for urban development in a world dominated by issues of competitiveness". In other words it simplifies complexities, creates a shared vision, a sense of 'them' and 'us' and becomes a vehicle for galvanising and directing collective action across administrative, sectoral and even socio-cultural boundaries in search of shared benefits. It can also form the basis for reviving or reinventing regional identity in places where negative perceptions, external or internal, exist.

It should be noted however that such visions need to have some basis within existing functional and cultural realities (the other elements of the triangle): if the picture promoted is too far detached to be recognisable, it risks failure or rejection.

Parr (2005) argues that the CR is a helpful model for understanding the real operation of economies and society and has particular value as a spatial framework for the strategic planning of land-use, transport and other public goods (eg healthcare provision, green infrastructure) which have impacts beyond narrowly drawn administrative boundaries. However, he too cautions that promoters of CRs will sooner or later "run up against local allegiance and loyalties, an awareness of cultural identity, a sense of place on the part of an area's population, the willingness to accept an existing but unsatisfactory regional delimitation and aversion to change" (p565).

He also discusses the advantages of 'borrowed size' in the case of PURs, whereby smaller settlements can collectively sustain facilities, services, labour markets and so on that they could not on their own.

However as Docherty at al (2004) observe: "Many of the supposed benefits of city-scale critical mass (intangibles of eg ambiance, knowledge spillovers, chance exchange, concentration of diverse consumption options) become diluted beyond usefulness when atomised across complex dispersed urban networks."

There is also the danger for PURs of being less than the sum of the parts rather than more: smaller-scale infrastructure, lack of high order business services and division of effort among competing centres can all combine to create an unfavourable investment prospect.

When it comes to governance structures, the CR concept is seen as a helpful tool. Deas (2005) reports that the findings of the ESRC Cities programme "reinforce long-standing arguments that policy-making ought to be organised around more expansively delimited city-regions...effective urban governance relies on drawing institutional geometries which reflect the functional extent of housing, labour and business market areas."

This is not to suggest necessarily that local authority boundaries should be instantly redrawn as CRs. Rather it is suggested that a pragmatic accommodation with multi-level governance and a willingness to work within flexible made-to-measure partnerships mixing public, private and voluntary sectors across formal administrative boundaries, is the way forward in most cases (Salet, Thornley et al. 2003; Robinson 2004).

For individual local authorities, there are clear advantages to collaboration across a CR in order to enhance combined position, since financial, intellectual and governmental resources within a given city are always limited. Opportunities arise to reduce fragmentation and duplication of effort, to hear a richness of alternative viewpoints and ideas and to innovate and exchange expertise in a shared environment.

Such partnership-working is not without its challenges of course. Docherty et al (2004) suggest it is "bound to be a complex and politically difficult process" and that joint-working follows a collaboration continuum over an extended period of time, requiring the careful nurturing of social capital, mutual trust and habits of communication (Figure 3). There is always the risk that partners may retreat back into competition when benefits are not forthcoming (especially where historical rivalries exist) and the danger of 'pork-barrel politics' in strategic resource allocation decisions. The key is for participants always to be able to see a clear answer to the question 'what's in it for me?' Very often this may be something to do with transport, both an easy shared goal and an important contributing factor (if not a precondition) to the successful fostering of an effectively functioning single economic space within the CR.

One of the important benefits of the CR approach is that it provides a strategic guide when resource allocations get tough, helping to focus on the eventual long-term benefits to all of individual funding decisions.

Increasing intensity of collaboration

Networking	Coordination	Cooperation	Collaboration
Dialogue and common understanding	Exploring shared needs and potential for coordination	Share resources to address common issues	Build interdependent system to address issues and opportunities
Loose/flexible links	Central body of people as communication hub	Central body of people consists of decision makers	Consensus used in shared decision making; resources and joint budgets are developed
Non-hierarchical	Facilitative leaders	Links formal with written agreement	Ideas and decisions equally shared
Minimal decision making	Complex decision making	Autonomous leadership but with group decision making in central and subgroups	Leadership high, trust level high, productivity high
Informal communication	Formal communication within the central group	Communication is common and prioritized	Highly developed communication systems

Figure 3: The collaboration continuum. ***Source: (Docherty et al, 2004, after Himmelman)***

It is interesting to note however amidst all this talk of partnership working, that the ten boroughs of the former metropolitan county of Manchester have just formally applied to Local Government minister David Miliband to form a new city-regional authority (Walker 2005a; Walker 2005b; Walker 2005c). They clearly believe that a formalised CR-wide administration with the ability to influence operations well beyond the old metropolitan county boundary (ie the functional CR), is the right step now.

Unsurprisingly, dissenting voices are being heard; cries of "big-city government", accusations of Manchester "threatening the future prosperity of places like Barrow and East Lancashire" by swallowing up funding otherwise destined for impoverished suburban and rural locations across the North West (Mann 2005; Walker 2005a).

This serves to remind us that the CR, for all its utility, is ultimately a construct and behind it lie real people with powerful allegiances fighting for limited resources and facing difficult choices. As Ward and Jonas (2004) observe, "the functional reification of city-regions as normative rational actors in a space economy comprised of flows

and exchanges...ignores the underlying social relations...[the] struggles around the production and consumption of material goods, services, fiscal transfers, etc within urban and regional spaces". They contend that "competitive city-regionalism is best understood as an ongoing struggle for control of space rather than an emergent form of capitalist territorial competition and development." (p2135)

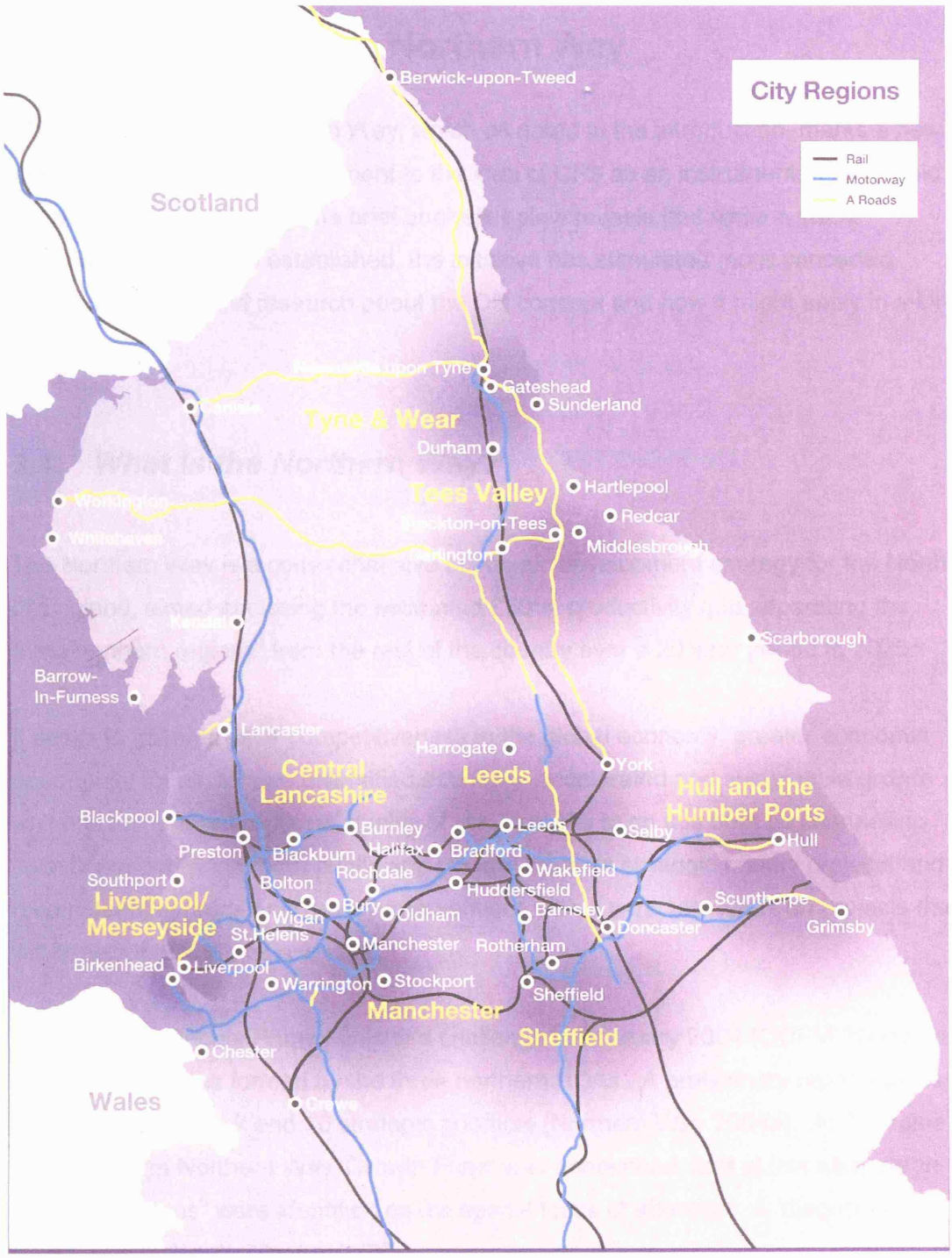

Figure 4: The Northern Way City Regions. ***Source: (Northern Way, 2005a)***

3. City Regions in the Northern Way

We come now to the Northern Way, which as noted in the introduction, marks a new level of interest in and commitment to the idea of CRs as an instrument of economic development in England. The brief analysis below reveals that while a stable definition has not been established, the initiative has stimulated more concerted, intensive thinking and research about the CR concept and how it might apply in a UK context.

3.1. What is the Northern Way?

The Northern Way is a comprehensive economic development strategy for the North of England, aimed at closing the estimated £30bn productivity gap separating the three northern regions[4] from the rest of the country over a 20 year period to 2025.

It seeks to foster greater competitiveness in the global economy, greater economic opportunity for all, a more diversified economy, accelerated and sustainable growth while retaining an exceptional quality of life. It seeks to do this both by channelling investment decisions (both public and private) towards strategic priority projects and recommending (additional) policy interventions with a particular focus on projects that will benefit the North as a whole.

Following the Deputy Prime Minister's challenge in February 2004 (ODPM 2004a), a steering group was formed by the three northern RDAs. A preliminary report outlined the nature of the task and 10 strategic priorities (Northern Way 2004a). At the same time, a £100m Northern Way 'Growth Fund' was announced, and at this early stage eight city regions[5] were identified as the spatial focus of attention. A 'diagnostic report' was presented for each CR.

In June 2005, a detailed 3-year Business Plan for the period 2005-8 was published (Northern Way 2005a), accompanied by detailed City Region Development

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[4] North West, North East, Yorkshire & Humber

[5] Central Lancashire, Hull & Humber Ports, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Tees Valley, Tyne & Wear

Programmes (CRDP) for each of the eight CRs outlining their own priorities, action plans and wishlists for additional government support, often backed by technical appendices and supporting papers.

3.2. What does the Northern Way say about City Regions?

A comprehensive review of the documents is not attempted here – this is work for a separate study – but several broad observations can be made.

First, the basic premise of the CR approach set out in the first growth strategy report is the simple assertion that the eight CRs "house 90% of the North's population and more than 90% of its economic activity... in broad terms, they correspond with the major travel to work areas, shopping catchments and housing markets" (Northern Way 2004a) (p10). It notes that most of the North's recent GVA growth has taken place in the eight CRs, and asserts that the CRs offer the greatest ongoing prospects for growth.

Second, the definition of each CR was presented at the outset as (deliberately) vague (see the celebrated 'purple haze' diagram, Figure 4) in recognition that more research needed to be done to understand better the boundaries of each CR in terms of TTW, labour, housing and other market areas. The data and maps in Appendices A and B provides an overview of how each CR has variously defined and graphically represented itself.

Third, the Northern Way conception of CRs owes a great deal to the CCWG's *Our Cities Are Back* report, regularly borrowing concepts, stock phrases and even whole sentences. CRs are described as "the building blocks of the northern economy and we must optimise their performance" (Northern Way 2004a) (p2). Not long after (p9), we find discussion of the CCWG Parkinson report (Parkinson, Hutchins et al. 2004). And on page 10:

> "We are clear that if our city regions do not prosper, then the North will not prosper."

The analysis and language is strikingly similar to the CCWG work. There is nothing necessarily sinister about this, indeed it is to be expected given the overlap between

the Core Cities and Northern Way CRs, and the wisdom of building on existing research rather than duplicating effort. However, given the similarities, we should be wary of potentially the same weaknesses, in particular the fact that the Northern Way too is an advocacy document and therefore may be inclined to talk up the benefits of its proposals and to underplay or suppress potential problems, difficulties or areas of uncertainty.

Fourth, the Northern Way explicitly acknowledges the *differences* between the eight CRs and in this sense it differs from the CCWG which talks more normatively about the 'central' or 'core' city and its surrounding region. By contrast the Northern Way acknowledges that plans to accelerate economic development must reflect the varied circumstances of the CRs, and moreover that some have more growth potential than others. To expect them all to "grow at the same pace ignores the evidence which suggests otherwise." In this sense, it shows an astute awareness of the unique, path-dependent nature of urban development which Turok (2004) urges. This is just as well, however, given just how varied the eight CRs are in terms of size (both population and spatial), morphology, history, economic structure, key industry sectors, culture, retail and leisure assets, labour force, skills, ethnic diversity and so on.

Fifth, it acknowledges the complementary roles and interactions that the CRs enjoy with each other, noting for example Tees Valley's dependence on Leeds and Tyne & Wear for business and professional services and the fit between Central Lancashire's advanced manufacturing firms and Manchester's finance and consultancy sectors.

Finally, it hints (p17) at tentative moves towards collaborative planning between Manchester and Leeds, the two largest, most advanced and diversified CR economies in the North, in a bid to offer a genuine alternative to London, thus raising the tantalising possibility of an emerging bi-polar or polycentric northern Mega City Region structure.

Subsequent Northern Way documents for the most part repeat or reinforce this basic approach to the CRs set out in the first report. The main new contribution has come in the form of the eight individual CRDPs published in June 2005. These are all highly individual documents with no consistency of content or presentation. While this makes them less easy to compare or summarise conveniently, it is a healthy

reflection of the highly specific, differentiated approach that each CR has adopted in response to its own conditions and challenges.

As the 2005 Business Plan notes, these CRDPs provide for the first time an in-depth analysis of the North's major urban economies as functional CRs. They "contain many new ideas, some of which have yet to be tested" as well as long-established and funded priorities alongside "aspirational aspects" in need of further evidence building (Northern Way 2005a). They will continue to be subject to review, development and refinement in line with the Northern Way action plan, ready for further progress reports in December 2005.

No summary of their content is attempted here (the Tees Valley CRDP is reviewed at Section 4). Each has its analytical strengths and weaknesses, some have a more pronounced 'geo-strategic' or visioning flavour (Central Lancashire for example), some start to open up new research approaches (eg Tyne & Wear's thought-provoking appendices on polynuclearity and diversity). It is sufficient to note that taken together, these documents constitute a significant new body of 'live' action research from which many fresh insights into the nature and functioning of CRs may be gained.

3.3. Conclusions and Critique

The Northern Way Steering Group's chair, Sir Graham Hall, claimed at the launch of the Business Plan that "the involvement of the three northern regions and the eight City Regions represents the most significant economic development collaboration in Europe this decade" (Northern Way 2005b). Other observers (NW Developer 2005; ODPM Official 2005) privately dismiss the project as "smoke and mirrors", "something and nothing", a mere re-packaging of existing strategies and funds.

I am inclined to side with Sir Graham. The mere fact of the Northern Way's existence as a spatio-economic vision starts to turn it into some kind of reality (the 'geo-strategic' function). It has directly involved over 70 local authorities and several hundred other stakeholder groups in the formation of the CRDPs, is backed by an action plan, funding and an executive team. It has stimulated a pragmatic readiness to go beyond organisational and institutional silos to start doing things differently. It

could even be said to have precipitated if not actually originated Manchester's bid for formal CR status. It is hard not to admit that at some level it is beginning to shape rhetoric, perceptions and increasingly action.

But it is not unproblematic. The Northern Way brings us no closer to a stable definition of a CR. This perhaps means there isn't one – it's always specific to the CR in question. We should also be mindful of the Northern Way's status as a lobbying tool, although the documents show a readiness to acknowledge weaknesses and uncertainties in the arguments where they arise.

Its major conceptual weakness, which it shares with the CCWG work, is the unproven, implicit assumption that it is possible, simply by adopting a CR approach, to spread the benefits of the high value, high growth cores to the wider CR, to make the economic activity 'jump' from current locations to secondary centres. No strategy explains how this trickle-down or trickle-out effect might actually work.

However, the cultivation of the CR approach and the overarching image/map of the Northern Way, does provide a set of interpretative frameworks for clarifying the complex spatial and economic development patterns of the real world, both at CR and wider trans-regional or MCR level, and for uniting effort around a clear vision.

If the Northern Way is first and foremost a political enterprise – a vehicle for mobilising and aligning collective effort for the achievement of common goals – then it has chosen its geo-strategic tools well.

4. The Tees Valley City Region

We come finally to assess how the CR concept has been applied to the Tees Valley, and how comfortably it fits with the particular circumstances of the area – economic, spatial, historical, social, cultural, political.

4.1. Defining the Tees Valley

The Tees Valley CR, as defined in the Tees Valley City Region Development Programme (Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit 2005) – or TVCRDP as I shall refer to it for convenience – has a population of 875,000 comprising the five unitary authorities of Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees, together with the district of Sedgefield (Co. Durham). The 'sphere of influence' extends north to Peterlee and south and west into rural North Yorkshire, taking in the local service centres and often affluent hinterlands of Barnard Castle, Richmond and Northallerton through to Whitby in the East. These definitions are based on commuting, housing market and retail/leisure catchments.

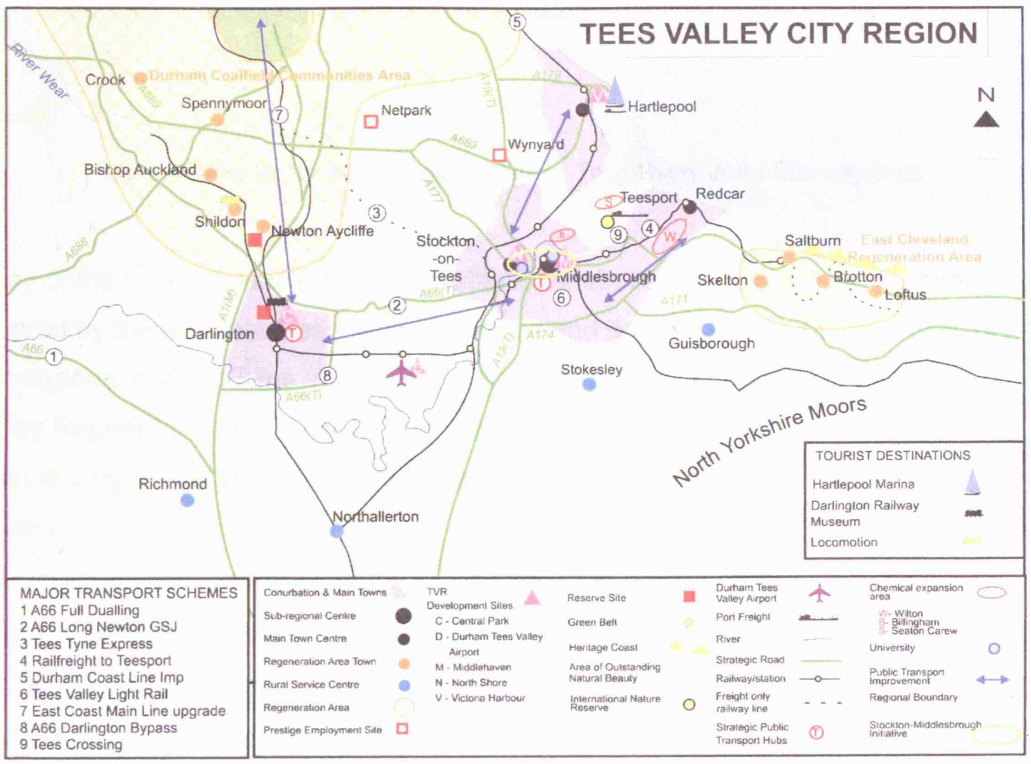

Figure 5: The Tees Valley City Region. ***Source: TVCRDP, 2005***

The settlement pattern is polycentric (Figure 6) although dominated by the principal conurbation of the contiguous built-up areas of Stockton, Middlesbrough, Billingham and Redcar (approx population 400,000), with the towns of Hartlepool and Darlington providing the other sub-regional centres.

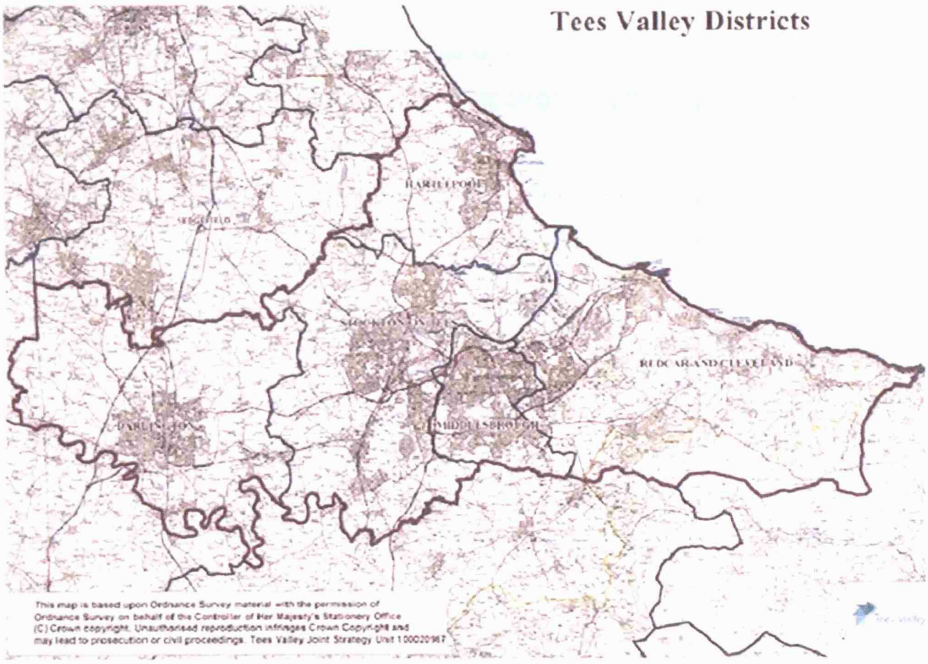

Figure 6: Tees Valley Morphology. ***Source: Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit.***

Many of the local administrative and institutional structures map onto the territory covered by the five core Tees Valley unitaries and there is an extensive 'family' of sub-regional bodies: Tees Valley Partnership, Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit, Tees Valley Regeneration (the URC), Tees Valley Living (the shadow Housing Market restructuring body), Business Link Tees Valley, Tees Valley Learning & Skills Council.

4.2. *The TVCRDP and its precursors*

A review of recent Tees Valley policy documents makes it quickly clear that the TVCRDP does not mark a major paradigm shift in strategic regeneration approaches for the area. In fact it is just the most recent incarnation of what has become a well-established habit of treating the Tees Valley as a functional CR and working across administrative boundaries and public, private and voluntary/community sectoral divisions to develop shared strategies for the economic, physical and social renewal of the area (Figure 7).

Date	Title	Commissioned/Published by
April 2001	Tees Valley Baseline and Scenario Study (GHK report)	ONE North East, English Partnerships and the five Tees Valley unitary authorities
2002	Tees Valley Vision Strategic Framework Tees Valley Partnership Action Plan, 2003-2006	Tees Valley Partnership Tees Valley Partnership
September 2004	Tees Valley City Region Diagnostic Report (Northern Way Technical Appendix)	Northern Way Steering Group
June 2005	Tees Valley City Region Development Programme	Northern Way Steering Group

Figure 7: Timeline of Tees Valley City Region strategies. ***Source: author***

The two main precursors to the TVCRDP are the *Tees Valley Baseline and Scenario Study* (GHK International 2001), which laid the groundwork for the *VisionTees Valley Vision Strategic Framework* (Tees Valley Partnership 2002).

The *Vision* was intended to: provide the policy context to establish an Urban Regeneration Company; respond to the then recent news of major job losses at Corus and its uncertain future; make the case for increased public sector expenditure on regeneration and economic development in the sub-region; but above all to "provide a coherent long term programme for the development of the area...*to which all the partners can subscribe through their activities*" (my emphasis).

It paints a picture of a transformed Tees Valley by 2020 with "a rebuilt economy, rebuilt homes, a revived urban core, a high quality environment, a reputation for innovation, technological change and companies prospering in the European knowledge-driven economy". In order to do this it proposes a focus on three core strands: Creating Sustainable Jobs, Creating Attractive Places, Creating Confident Communities.

These priorities reappear in the 2005 TVCRDP, refined into specific action plans for sectors and locations:

- a strategy for the **Chemicals and heavy engineering cluster**, the UK's largest integrated chemicals complex *and* the most productive with a productivity index of 187 against the UK average of 100
- a credible plan to develop a leading role in the emerging **hydrogen, bio-diesel and other renewable energy technologies** of the future, adapting and building on the area's unique assets of massive physical plant (pipeline networks, storage capacity), access to deep-water ports, R&D labs and technicians, plus maintenance, energy management and process–engineering expertise
- expansion of the international logistics and passenger gateways of **Teesport** and **Durham-Tees Valley Airport**, enhancing connectivity to and from Tees Valley to global networks
- support for and closer collaboration with the two **Universities** (Teesside and Durham, Stockton Campus) as key creators and conduits of knowledge capital as well as significant employers and economic drivers in their own right
- creating a genuine sense of '**Cityness'** at the heart of the subregion through judicious long- term redevelopment of the Stockton-Middlesbrough conurbation to offer high quality urban culture, leisure and housing options
- complementary strategies for the **Coastal Arc** and **Darlington Gateway**
- plans to tackle barriers to growth such as poor **internal connectivity** (principally public transport links) and the lack of a **viable housing market**; and finally...
- addressing **worklessness and aspirational deficits**: the poor skills, low self-esteem, dependency culture and lack of achievement, especially amongst young people, forms a major constraint to long-term recovery; this is being tackled with numerous school improvement, apprenticeship and enterprise training initiatives.

There is a high degree of continuity between the 2001 GHK study and all subsequent strategies in terms of key investment priorities, sectoral and spatial focus and specific tactical interventions, suggesting that the earlier strategic work was highly successful in shaping a common area-wide vision and approach to regeneration.

It also provided a solid framework for commissioning further research, feasibility reports and options appraisals to substantiate and flesh out specific topics, helping to focus time, effort and funding onto critical issues and reducing duplication across the sub-region.

In addition, the TVCRDP and its precursors have made it possible to project an effective, unified and consistent voice for the CR into important region-wide policy initiatives. These include the new statutory Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East currently in draft form (North East Assembly 2005), the revised Regional Economic Strategy (ONE North East 2005), the regional housing and transport strategies (forthcoming) and of course the Northern Way, all of which adopt an explicit CR-based approach to economic and spatial planning and acknowledge the specific priorities set out in the TVCRDP.

On paper at least, the Tees Valley has a unified and clearly articulated regeneration vision based explicitly on a CR approach, with a set of administrative and governance frameworks to support it.

4.3. Barriers, Tensions, Issues

But there are a number of obstacles and tensions embedded within the Tees Valley CR approach which need unpicking. They concern a series of interrelated issues around the Tees Valley 'brand', historic regional and local identities, internal and external perceptions of the area and the very notion of whether or not a 'city' is needed for this putative 'city region'.

First, the 'Tees Valley' name and concept itself. While a familiar and accepted term amongst the professional community of planners, economists, regeneration specialists, bureacrats and politicians – all steeped in the language of the policy documents and partnership boards – it is resisted by many locals as an ersatz designation with little historic resonance or appeal. 'Teesside' has deeper cultural roots and its disappearance or apparent suppression from the official lexicon – for

example in the recent renaming of the airport from 'Teesside' to 'Durham Tees Valley' – is regretted by many. 'Cleveland', another term with historic pedigree, is now increasingly forgotten following the dismantling of Cleveland County into the current unitary authorities in 1996.

These issues are forcefully raised by Craig Hornby, a local film-maker who made headlines in 2004 by selling out a Teesside multiplex cinema for several weeks with *A Century in Stone,* a small-budget independent documentary about the neglected history of Teesside's iron industry. The cover of the DVD pointedly states: "Made in TEESSIDE-not-Tees Valley, CLEVELAND-not-Yorkshire". Inside, under the title 'Why this film matters', Hornby argues that

> "... decades of visionless local authorities failing to promote and invest in our roots plus the effects of divisive political scheming have damaged a collective sense of identity and belonging ... one [borough] believes in Teesside being split along the river and returned to Yorkshire and Durham. Furthermore, we have our unelected quango of suits who had the audacity to scorn Teesside and 'brand' us Tees Valley. And that in itself lost us our airport!" (Hornby 2004)

Such views are far from uncommon and give a flavour of the depth of local passion. Of course one of the difficulties faced by the 'suits' is that the Tees Valley CR doesn't neatly match the old Teesside or Cleveland territories, including as it does the whole of Darlington Borough not to mention sections of County Durham and North Yorkshire. However, it shows that the Tees Valley descriptor does not always sit well with local sensibilities or identities.

Second, and inter-related, is the problem of the negative perceptions of the area held both internally and externally, a product of multiple factors: poor environmental quality due to a century and a half of heavy industry; acute socio-economic problems caused by wide-scale and severe industrial contraction and restructuring from the 70's onwards; high unemployment, high crime, low skills, low aspirations, poor educational attainment, benefits and drug dependency; and poor perceptions of the housing offer and general quality of urban living within the main centres.

As Hornby's work highlights, there is also very little awareness, either within the area or beyond, of the proud role Teesside once played in the world economy, producing a third of the world's iron supply and building such icons as the Tyne and Sydney

Harbour Bridges, nor of the significant, if unglamorous role, it still plays in the UK economy.

Finally, there is the knotty question of a city for the CR. On the one hand, the Tees Valley is polycentric both morphologically and functionally: the various settlements play interdependent roles as employment, residential, leisure, and transportation hubs. On the other, the central Teesside conurbation undoubtedly dominates. But then again, the conurbation could hardly be said to add up to a full scale 'city', assembled as it is from an overgrown historic market town (Stockton), a mid-nineteenth century industrial 'iron-rush' company town (Middesbrough), some major petrochemical installations, significant tracts of de-industrialised brownfield wasteland and various lesser settlements which may all be contiguous but are hardly joined-up culturally and sometimes harbour fiercely separatist identities (witness the existence of two separate independent political groups on Stockton Borough Council representing Thornaby and Ingleby Barwick respectively).

The overall result is a lack of 'city-scale assets' and the positive urban qualities highlighted in Section 2.1. High-value, high-skilled knowledge workers and firms with choice and mobility do not choose to live or work in the conurbation, generally locating only to the outer fringes (Teesdale business park or the newly developed dormitory settlement of Ingleby Barwick) or to the attractive small towns and villages in the rural hinterlands of the CR (Figure 8). Central areas suffer ongoing depopulation and abandonment (Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit 2005).

Moreover, as the recent Tees Valley Housing Market Assessment reports, "evidence from focus group discussions suggests that residents (at least better-off people) relate to major centres as far away as York and Newcastle" for many retail, cultural and leisure services (DCHR Ltd and Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners Ltd 2005) so the city core is not even capturing its full potential share of consumer spending from its own residents.

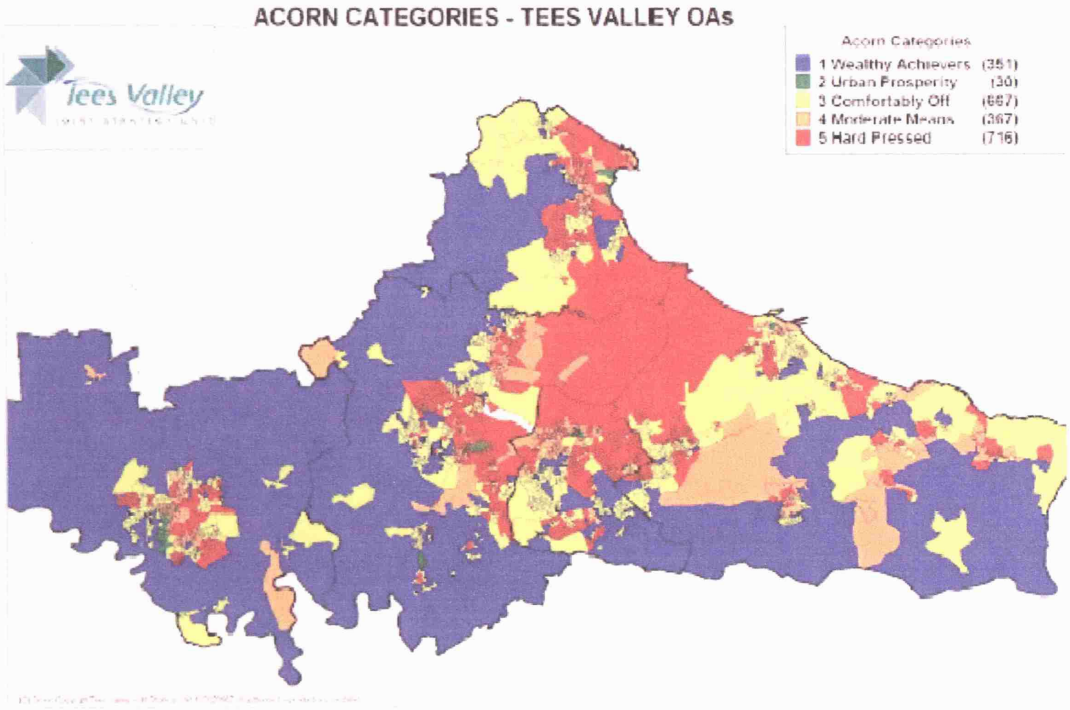

Figure 8: ACORN Categories by Tees Valley Census Output Areas, 2001. This map shows the predominance of low-income 'Hard-pressed' socio-economic groups (red) in the urban cores while 'Wealthy Achievers' (blue) occupy the rural hinterlands. ***Source: DHCR Ltd 2005***

There are concerted moves to tackle these problems of the viability and attractiveness of the urban core. Middlesbrough's new contemporary art gallery and public square due in 2006 will significantly upgrade the cultural offer, civic and physical environment of the town centre. The redevelopment of Middlehaven, a prominent, long-vacant former dock close to the town core and Middlesbrough FC's Riverside Stadium, promises a new high-value, high-concept, mixed-use development by Will Alsop (Alsop 2004) which is already beginning to shift perceptions of Teesside, judging from the queue of quality developers who have sought to get involved (TVR 2005).

Underpinning all this is the Stockton-Middlesbrough Initiative (SMI 2004; Gillespies 2005), a long-term programme to engender a "Spectrum of Cityness" by evolving complementary roles for the two town centres within a "more vibrant and densely inhabited continuous overall urban setting", focusing particular effort on a radical 'green-blue heart' park concept of water and open space along the River Tees linking the two cores (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Aerial view of the area covered by the Stockton-Middlesbrough Initiative. Stockton town centre is on the left of the image, west of the Tees. Middlesbrough is middle right with Middlehaven dock and the football stadium visible just to the north east of the town core. *(Source: SMI 2004)*

And while the problems of abandonment and housing market failure in central areas of Middlesbrough are acute and challenging, the flipside is that this allows an opportunity to consider wide-scale urban restructuring to alter the housing mix, improve amenities, open space and transport infrastructure, in short to create a new urban environment. Such change is notoriously difficult and the first steps have so far been faltering (Clover 2005). But the opportunity is nonetheless there, and immense.

There are however, some who remain sceptical of the plausibility or even desirability of a city for the CR. Drawing on findings from focus groups of higher earners already in the Tees Valley, a recent report (DCHR Ltd and Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners Ltd 2005) cites "a modest appetite for the town centre/waterside offers of urban living" and suggests "the draw of the main regional cities [ie Newcastle, Leeds or Manchester] is likely to be much stronger for this market." (p59). It characterises Tees Valley as:

> "...a group of urban and even ex-urban centres...with little prospect of developing one major City centre, even if this were desirable... easily accessible to those with a car, but a difficult geography for public transport. Its future is arguably more Los Angeles than the traditional European model."

It is possible to argue with some of the report's assumptions but it serves as a useful indication that the current market climate does not value the Tees Valley 'city' offer very highly.

It should also be acknowledged that some of the industrial infrastructure (eg the petrochemical and port facilities) essential to the long-term economic health of the area does not fit comfortably with a vision of urbane city living. There is a conflict of image here that needs creative resolution.

Finally there are political tensions about the over-dominance of the core conurbation. The prospect of TeesCity 2025 (Middlesbrough Borough Council 2005), while a welcome vision for some, represents an unacceptable act of hubris and political power-play to others (NE Regeneration 2005).

5. Conclusions

Before concluding, it is appropriate to set down some caveats about the scope of the study, the nature of the findings and areas for further research.

It is acknowledged that the paper would benefit from further quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analysis to substantiate, expand and nuance the findings set out below. It would also be valuable to benchmark Tees Valley's current position and ongoing performance against a selection of UK, European and US comparator CRs.

Finally, it is notable that I encountered no references to or discussion of the Northern Way in my review of the academic literature. This indicates just how new this area of research is and how preliminary the conclusions must therefore be. There is room for more in-depth investigation into the genesis and progress of the Northern Way CR approach, and also of the notion of The Northern Way as emerging prototype for a Manchester-Leeds Mega City Region.

We may now return to the original research questions and draw some (very) provisional conclusions.

City Regions in the Northern Way

The Northern Way offers no fixed conception or definition of CRs, other than the broad assertion that an economically healthy city (or urban core) is the secret to a healthy CR, and to a healthy North. Each CR within the Northern Way has developed a highly tailored approach to measuring, defining and proposing solutions for their own specific challenges. The CRDPs collectively constitute a significant live research project offering major potential for deeper learning about the nature of CRs.

The Tees Valley as City Region

The CR concept does make sense in the context of the Tees Valley, to the extent that it reflects a recognisable economic entity consisting of a group of interdependent settlements linked by complex overlapping flows of goods, services, labour and

capital. It can thus be regarded as a valid unit of economic analysis and of strategic plan-making.

A question-mark remains over whether the Tees Valley is monocentric or polycentric in form. Morphologically and functionally, the main conurbation dominates, but lacks some critical functions that might be regarded as key criteria for qualification as a monocentric CR, such as mainline rail connectivity, a critical mass of advanced business services and a significant cultural or retail offer. It is also insufficiently compact and dense to afford a number of the agglomeration and 'proximity' benefits claimed for major urban centres.

There is also a queston as to whether the Tees Valley constitutes a 'secondary CR' within the North East or wider Northern MCR, rather than a primary CR in its own right. This is because it depends for some services (APS, specialised retail and cultural opportunities) on Tyne & Wear or Leeds.

Benefits of the CR approach

There are many benefits in adopting a CR approach in the Tees Valley, several already well-recognised and established within the CR.

First are the obvious *practical benefits of collective action*, avoiding duplication of effort and intra-regional competition, the pooling and sharing of expertise and ideas, more effective CR marketing (to internal and external audiences), greater political influence and lobbying power within central government.

At a strategic level, the CR structure encourages a *holistic approach* to regeneration problems. It provides a platform to work together to maximize economic cooperation and strategic planning on big projects of mutual benefit and interdependence across administrative borders, particularly housing, transport and other infrastructure projects (hospitals, schools, green space).

But the principal value of the CR concept, I would argue (following Van Houtum and Lagendijk 2001), is its *'geo-strategic' power* as an interpretative framework for spatial and economic planning, a guide through the complex maze of day-to-day challenges, and as a tool for visioning and renewing regional or local identities. The CR concept has the ability to 'change the narrative'. This potential has yet to be fully exploited

because hampered by local resistance to the Tees Valley 'brand', but the potential is there if a new formulation can be found.

There are also benefits to being a designated Northern Way CR: increased national and international profile and attention alongside some of the bigger English cities; learning from the conceptual advances and research findings shared between the Northern Way CRs; an opportunity to carve out a place within the emerging polycentric Northern mega-city region.

Pitfalls

Many of the pitfalls and obstacles were touched on in 4.3. Local resistance to the ersatz 'Tees Valley' brand is a significant barrier. Poor external and internal perceptions of the CR will need to be turned around. And the tensions over the nature and role of the main conurbation – to become a full-scale city or not – will need to be hammered out, not least because it will be one of the most important factors guiding future spatial, transport and land-use planning decisions. Given the historic opportunity for urban restructuring afforded by the current coincidence of circumstances – large amounts of brownfield land, the need for housing market restructuring in many central areas – this is an issue not to be fudged.

It is also very important to recognise that Tees Valley cannot, and should not try to, compete directly with the Manchester and Leeds CRs, or many other European cities. Its radically different development path, industrial structure, economic assets, urban form, social and institutional capital, skills base, natural setting and so on necessitate a different and tailored set of tactics rather than a blanket "European Competitive City" approach.

On the whole, the TVCRDP does not fall into the trap of platitudes and highlights some unique assets for exploitation. However, it has yet to turn this analysis into a powerfully distinctive brand capable of differentiating Tees Valley from everywhere else. This is not just about straplines – although they can be important – but about a guiding vision of difference. The Central Lancashire Partnership CRDP's concept of "a green city with room to breathe" marks them out among the eight Northern Way CRDPs. It will be important for the Tees Valley to agree on and cultivate some similar guiding principle, simultaneously grounded in real qualities of local distinctiveness while pointing towards an aspirational future.

Recommendations for policy and action

To maximise the benefits and minimise the pitfalls of the CR approach in Tees Valley, the following areas for policy attention are suggested:

- Find, cultivate and exploit a unique **point of difference** for Tees Valley that is complementary to other places in the North, in England and in Europe

- Resolve the **Tees Valley branding** issue: already a lot of capital has been invested into the Tees Valley label so realistically it will be hard to drop altogether; in which case creative, proactive strategies are needed to rehabilitate and/or build local acceptance.

- Develop strategies for **nurturing shared identity:** this covers a range of tools including the strategic creation or invocation of symbolic icons (cf the Angel of the North, the Transporter Bridge in Middlesbrough) and use of CR-branded events and initiatives (hosting major national and regional sporting and cultural events)

- Critical focus on **quality of place:** many of the desired changes partly depend on improved perceptions of the area, which in turn depends a lot on perceived quality of place. Amidst the major restructuring work of the next two decades, quality of place will need to remain firmly front of mind as an economic priority

- Strengthen city-regional **strategic planning and masterplanning capacity**: the statutory planning system will be the ultimate delivery mechanism for much change. A formally constituted Tees Valley-wide joint spatial planning unit linked with transport planning, should be formed to ensure maximum leverage is gained from the planning system. This could be based on or form part of the existing Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit and learn from emerging models elsewhere such as North Northamptonshire Together's new joint planning unit.

- A proactive strategy to improve internal and external **perceptions of heavy industry**, combining education and marketing activities to promote its value in facts and figures and as a unique source of pride.

- Settle the '**cityness'** debate: it cannot be allowed to remain unresolved or it will confuse and distort strategic planning decisions for years to come.

- Develop deeper **understanding and mapping of functional economic linkages** between different centres in the CR in order inform intervention strategies, making best use of nearby (regionally-based) expertise – CURDS in Newcastle and Durham University's Geography department.

On balance, I see the CR approach as having many benefits for the Tees Valley, most importantly as a political 'geo-strategic' vision-making and interpretative tool. This is a surprising outcome since I began the research a sceptic. However this broadly positive assessment of the utility of the CR approach for Tees Valley should be tempered with a sober recognition of the many practical, political and identity-making challenges that lie ahead, as well as an acknowledgement that these findings are necessarily preliminary since the research area is still currently emerging and not thoroughly defined or understood.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Defining the Northern Way City Regions

City Region	Approx Population	Core City	Main Local Authorities	Additional peripheral areas
Central Lancashire CR	1,184,400	(polycentric)	Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Burnley, Chorley, Fylde, Hyndburn, Pendle, Preston, Ribble Valley, Wyre Rossendale, South Ribble,	West Lancashire, Lancaster
Hull and the Humber Ports CR	875,000	Hull	Kingston-upon-Hull, East Riding of Yorkshire, North Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire	-
Leeds CR	2,770,000	Leeds	Leeds, Barnsley, Bradford, Calderdale, Craven, York Harrogate, Kirklees, North Yorkshire, Selby, Wakefield,	-
Liverpool CR	2,000,000	Liverpool	Liverpool, Halton, Knowsley, St. Helens, Sefton, Wirral, Ellesmere Port & Neston, Chester, Warrington	Flintshire, Wrexham, West Lancashire
Manchester CR	3,000,000+	Manchester	Manchester, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Bury, Trafford, Bolton, Oldham, Rochdale, Wigan, High Peak, Congleton, Vale Royal, Macclesfield, Warrington	-
Sheffield CR	1,700,000	Sheffield	Sheffield, Rotherham, Chesterfield, Barnsley, Doncaster, Bassetlaw, Bolsover, Derbyshire Dales, North East Derbyshire	
Tees Valley CR	875,000	(polycentric)	Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough,Stockton-On-Tees, Redcar & Cleveland, Sedgefield	Parts of County Durham and rural North Yorkshire
Tyne & Wear CR	1,650,000	Newcastle-Gateshead	Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland, North Tyneside, South Tyneside	Blyth Valley, Wansbeck, Castle Morpeth, Tynedale, Derwentside, Chester-le-Street, Durham, Easington

Source: Author, compiled from the eight Northern Way CRDPs.

Appendix B: Mapping the Northern Way City Regions

This appendix brings together the various maps and diagrams produced by the eight Northern Way CR teams published in their CRDPs in June 2005. It shows at a glance that no consistent approach has been brought to the task of defining or graphically representing the CRs.

The maps are reproduced here exactly as they appear in the CRDPs. No scale or key is shown unless it appears in the original, and captions are reproduced faithfully (ie where none is quoted in the original, none appears here, although it should be noted that the main text of each CRDP includes a commentary on its own diagram).

Central Lancashire City Region

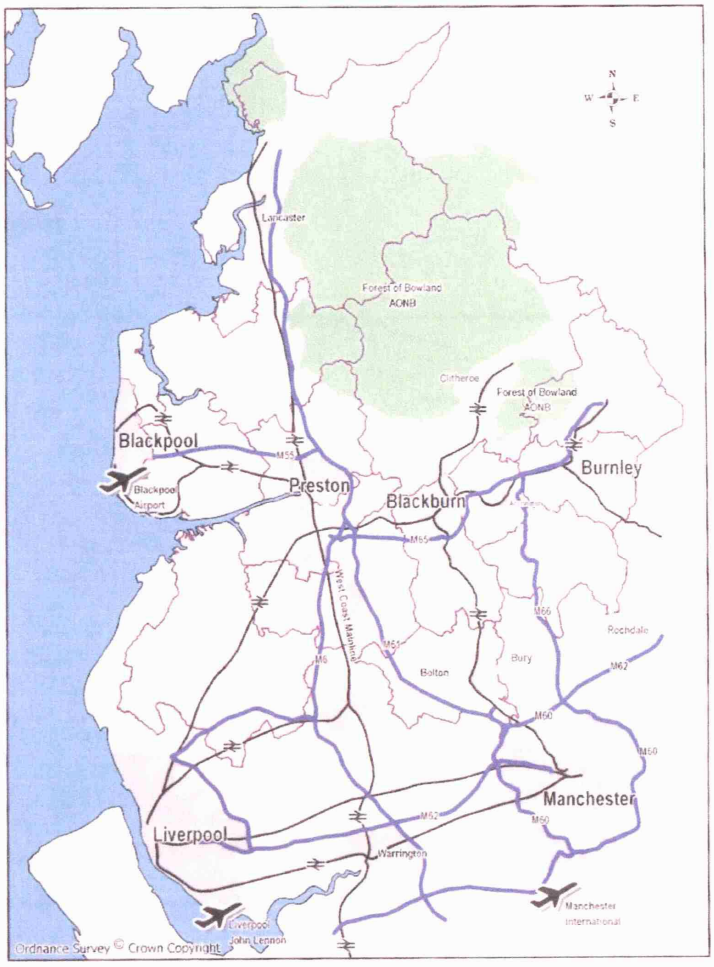

Figure i

Hull and Humber Ports City Region

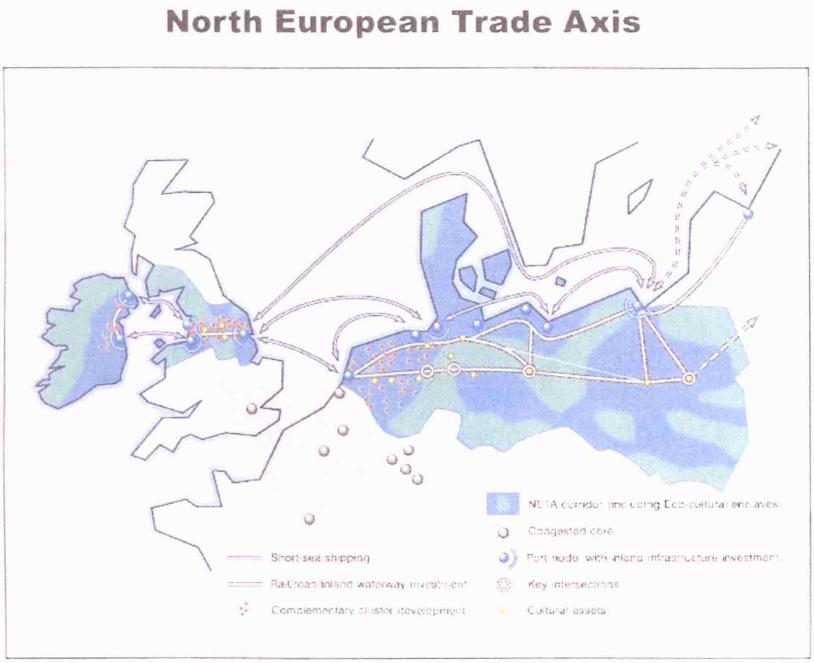

Figure ii

Leeds City Region

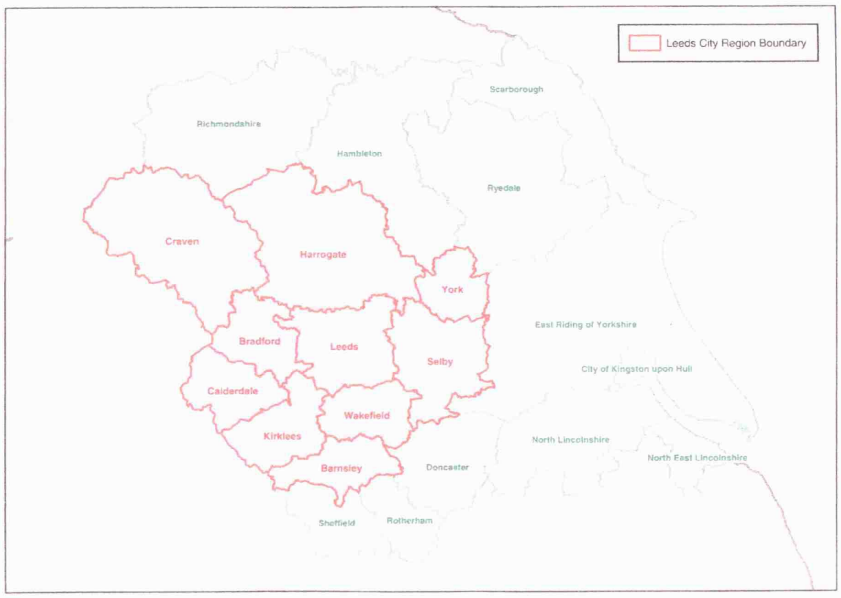

Figure iii

Liverpool City Region

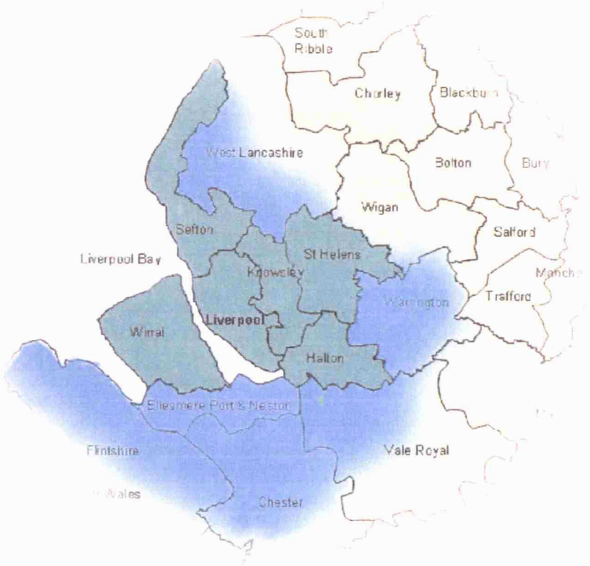

Figure iv

Manchester City Region – local authority boundary map

Figure v: The Manchester City Region

Manchester City Region – strategic diagram

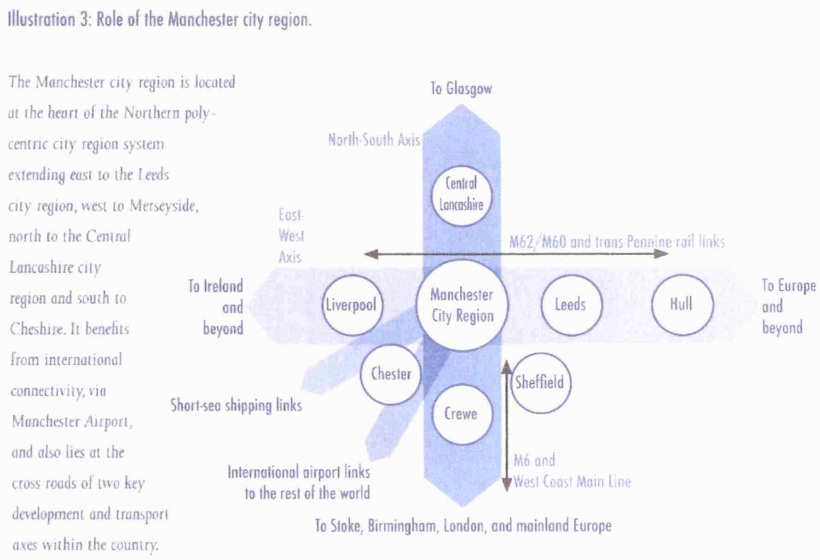

Figure vi: Role of the Manchester City Region

Sheffield City Region

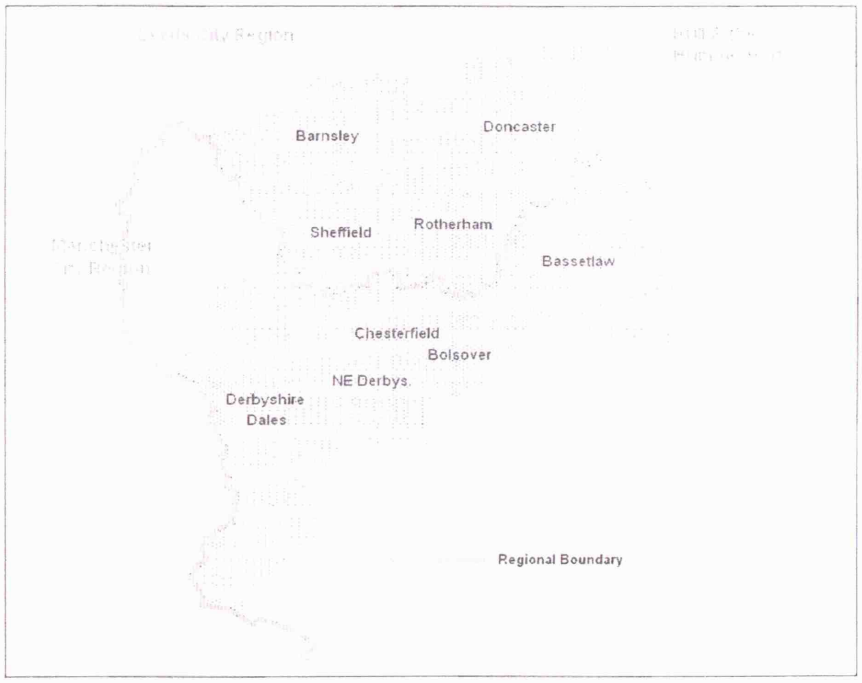

Figure vii: Map of Sheffield City Region

Tees Valley City Region

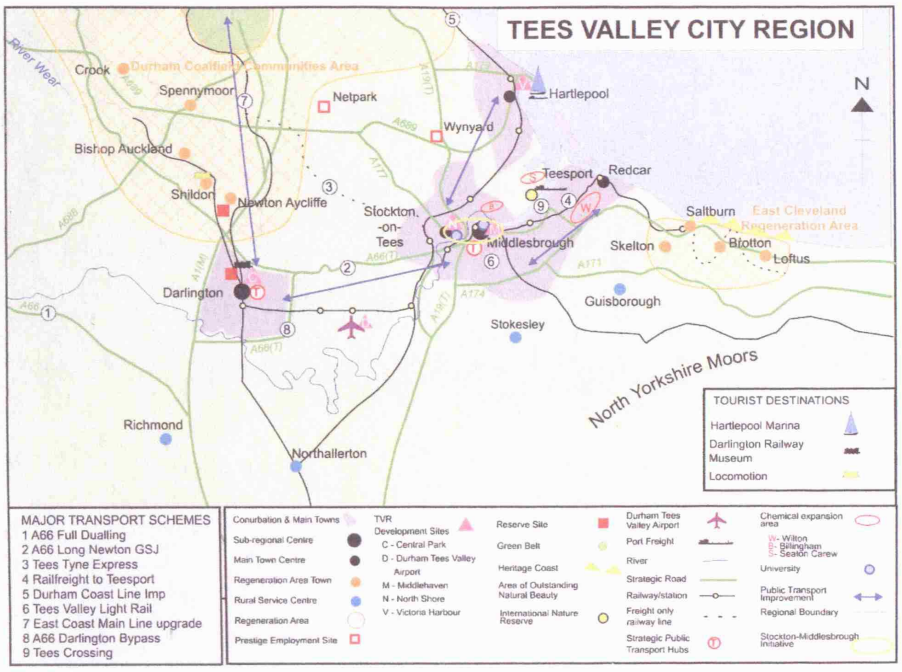

Figure viii: Tees Valley City Region

Tyne & Wear City Region

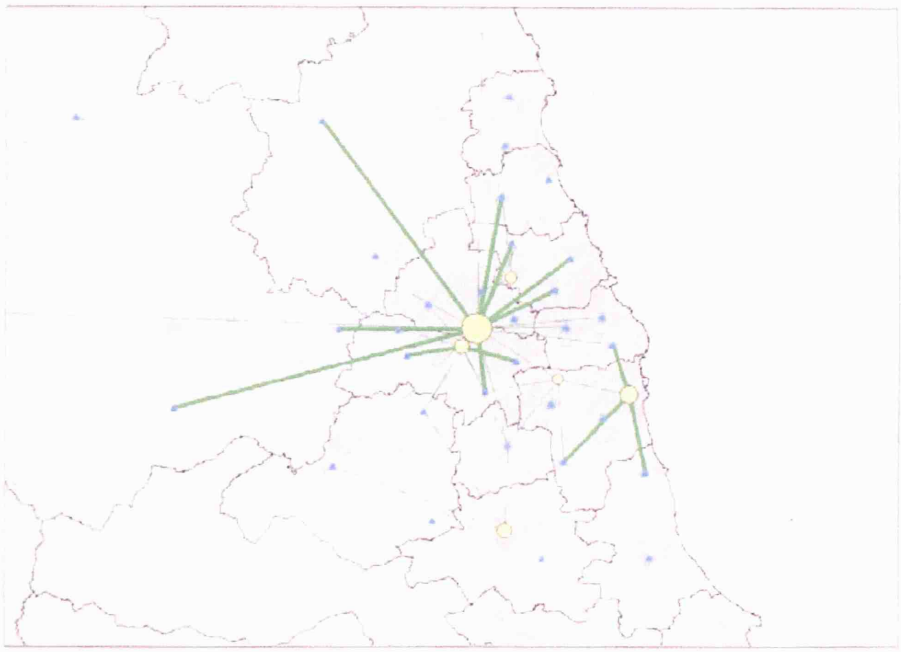

Figure ix: Total Commuting in 2001